

Abstract

New forms of religiosity in Indonesia are related to the spread of neoliberal governance but also appear to be producing new opportunities for agency. This article examines how Islamic piety can be a resource for Muslim women's political mobilization. Based on ethnographic research in Jakarta, Indonesia, I argue that the institutional aspects of Islamic piety, as well as the redefinition of Islamic piety as public practice, help to promote women's participation in the Indonesian political sphere. While some activists use Islamic discourses to contest gender inequality, others seek to contribute to the Islamization of Indonesia. Yet both visions are profoundly influenced by the conviction that piety is a public matter. The new public piety influenced by the global Islamic revival has empowered many women activists, but the political reforms they seek to achieve are diverse.

Biography

Rachel Rinaldo received her PhD in Sociology from the University of Chicago in August 2007. Her dissertation, "Mobilizing Piety: Women, Islam, and the Public Sphere in Indonesia," is an ethnography of women activists in Jakarta, Indonesia. Currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Asia Research Institute (National University of Singapore), she is working on a book manuscript about women, Islam, and the public sphere in Indonesia.

Pious Islam and Women's Activism in Indonesia

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INTRODUCTION

The global Islamic revival has caused consternation in the West, much of it motivated by concerns that the spread of more orthodox forms of Islam threatens gains made by women in the twentieth century. Yet the Islamic revival has also coincided with the rise of women's movements and more participatory political cultures. In Indonesia, which has the largest Muslim population of any country, the women's movement that has emerged since the early 1990s includes Muslim women's organizations. Moreover, growing numbers of Indonesian women are becoming involved in Muslim organizations and institutions.

There is no simple answer to the question of what the Islamic revival means for women's rights and equality in places like Indonesia. Scholars of religion and gender have long debated the consequences for women of religious movements like Islam and evangelical Christianity. Rather than focusing on whether religion promotes or constrains women's liberation, another recent trend in scholarship has focused on the appeal of conservative or pious forms of religion for women (Smith-Hefner 2007; Meneley 2007; Jacobson 2006; Chong 2006; Brenner 1996). When it comes to Islam, this literature shows how women produce and transform selves through discipline and adherence to pious norms (Mahmood 2005; Göle 1996; Brenner 1996). For Mahmood, the conscious transformation of self through religion is a kind of agency not well captured by the Western feminist binary of resistance versus submission.

The emerging emphasis on Islamic piety is an important corrective to studies that neglect women's religiosity. For Mahmood (2005) and others, the concept of piety is a way of distinguishing a way of practicing Islam that breaks with older ways of being Muslim that did not necessarily foreground religious devotion. While the term piety is often used by scholars of religion to indicate an internal state of mind in which an individual seeks a relationship with a deity through thinking and acting in certain ways, Mahmood shows that the Islamic revival promulgates a concept of piety that is based in practice. For the women in the Egyptian piety movement, ritual performances are constitutive of values and beliefs. To be pious for many Muslims now means to practice Islam by adhering to norms of proper religiosity—especially prayer, avoidance of alcohol, and modesty. In this article, I show how a similar kind of piety is expressed by Indonesian women activists, but I am especially interested in the public aspects of their pious practices. For as both Mahmood (2005) and Göle (1996) note, the new pious Islam is intended to be made visible in the public sphere precisely through behaviors such as veiling.

While the recent focus on the transformation of selves is indeed valuable, in this article I argue that it risks downplaying the collective goals of many pious activists. Another productive way to think about Islam and women, I maintain, is to consider how new forms of Islamic piety are related to women's agency in the public sphere.

Sociologists have long recognized that religion is a resource for collective action. Casanova (1994) highlights the role of Catholicism in the contestation of authoritarian regimes in Poland and Brazil, and numerous scholars have discussed the religious roots of the American Civil Rights movement. As Rhys Williams (2003) argues, “Religion has been and continues to be a source of people, organizations, and ideas for many attempts at fostering or resisting social change. It can provide the organizational bases, the rhetorical messages, and the motivated adherents that are necessary for social movements to mobilize and be effective” (315). Following Williams, I seek to call attention to Islamic piety’s role in furthering Indonesian women activists’ collective goals.

Scholars of Indonesia, particularly Brenner (2005, 1996) and van Doorn-Harder (2006), argue that Islamic piety provides Indonesian women with a medium to express new ideas about religious and political authority. In particular, Brenner argues that the popularity of veiling in the 1990s represented a rebellion against tradition as well as opposition to an authoritarian government. Moreover, both also show that the institutional aspects of the Islamic revival have empowered new groups of women by providing them with education and career resources. In addition, in a recent study of a Shi’a community in Lebanon, Deeb (2006) maintains that pious Islam emphasizes women’s participation in public life.

I build on all of these studies by asking more specifically how Islamic piety can be a resource for contemporary Indonesian Muslim women’s political mobilization. In this article, I show that women activists’ pious practices, while related to different political goals, share an emphasis on the public. I maintain that the institutional aspects of Islamic piety, as well as the nature of Islamic piety as public practice, promote women’s participation in politics. My research also makes clear that the political and social agendas of pious Muslim activists may be oriented toward gender equality *or* toward Islamizing Indonesia. As Jeffery and Basu (1998) caution with regard to politicized religious movements in South Asia, the changes sought by empowered women activists are not always egalitarian.

ABOUT THE STUDY

This paper draws on my ethnographic fieldwork with women in four organizations in Jakarta, Indonesia. However, in this paper, I limit my comparison to two groups: Rahima, a non-government organization (NGO) that works on Muslim women’s rights; and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), an Islamic political party founded in 1998, which has a substantial number of women members and supporters.ⁱ Both organizations involve men and women – but my research focuses on the women.ⁱⁱ Though the women involved in these two groups are similar in their demographic characteristics—they are all university-educated, and mostly from lower-middle- to middle-class backgrounds—and in the fact that they are all deeply influenced by the Islamic revival, they have important differences in terms of their political agendas.

Rahima considers itself part of the women’s rights movement, collaborating with both secular women’s groups and progressive groups representing different religions. In this, Rahima is part of what some have called the “Muslim liberal left” in Indonesia. In

contrast, while the women of PKS don't deny the existence of gender discrimination, they are critical of feminism, which they consider un-Islamic. Their foremost goal is to make Indonesia a more Islamic country. I use the term "women activists" to describe women in both Rahima and PKS. In this, I aim not to define what is meant by women's rights or feminism, but rather to highlight the fact that women in both groups are attempting to mobilize other women in pursuit of political aims, and that much of their activism revolves around issues related to women (such as women's health or education).

The women activists I studied are all products of the Islamic revival that began in Indonesia in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many began wearing the *jilbab* (headscarf) in high school or college and became members of Muslim student organizations or prayer groups in a conscious attempt to become more Islamic. Like the women described in Mahmood's study of Egypt (2005), they cultivate their religiosity through bodily practices like prayer and veiling. But as activists, the women I studied demonstrate that religiosity does not necessarily mean only the cultivation of virtuous selves. Instead, Islamic piety can also be expressed through participation in the public sphere. For these women, political action is not an instrumental extension of their faith, but an expression of their religiosity itself.

RAHIMA: ISLAMIC REFORMISTS

Rahima is a small NGO based in Jakarta. Its staff members aim to reform both their religion and their society as a whole, and gender equality is a key aspect of the changes for which they are struggling. It is no accident that Rahima is closely associated with Indonesia's largest Muslim mass organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Many scholars have described how, beginning in the late 1980s, the NU experienced a revitalization of Islamic thought, characterized by a strong interest in reconciling Islam with ideas of democracy and human rights. Founded by young Islamic scholars from NU backgrounds, Rahima is one of the results of the transformation within NU circles.

The members of Rahima argue that at its core, Islam is about equality and justice. They frequently quote the lines of the Quran that state that all human beings are made of the same substance. This citation and others are viewed by them as proof of gender equality in the Quran.

Rahima staff members, who number about ten, are enthusiastic practitioners of Islam. Several staff members have advanced degrees in textual exegesis, and most read Arabic, with a few able to speak the language. Many are graduates of Muslim boarding schools and Muslim state universities. Religious devotion is very noticeable in the offices, with nearly all female staff wearing Muslim clothing like the *jilbab*, though it is certainly not required. Nevertheless, many members of Rahima came to their activism through student groups or the women's movement, and they maintain connections with such milieus. Several of the women I came to know best were deeply involved in student democracy activism in the late 1990s.

Rahima's activism emphasizes instilling ideas about gender equality in Indonesia's traditional Muslim boarding schools (*pesantren*). They organize workshops and trainings for teachers, students, and community members to disseminate revisionist interpretations of Islam that emphasize gender equality.

Rahima's Islamic Piety and Social Justice Activism

Religious piety is central to the lives of most of the people in Rahima. Staff members clearly take pleasure in prayer and ritual. Younger staff seem to relish the challenge of creating more stylish ensembles of Muslim clothing. Yet their piety is also intertwined with a conviction that to be a good Muslim means respecting others as full human beings with rights and responsibilities, and that includes a commitment to gender equality. For example, Ayu, a longtime student activist and now a program coordinator at Rahima, maintains that true religiosity is inseparable from rights and equality:

Claiming to be speaking in the name of God is not necessarily an indication of religiosity either. Religiosity is when a person tries to fully comprehend his/her own life and tries to implement the teachings of faith...When parents can give their children rights, when a husband can give rights to his wife and the wife to her husband, when people respect each other, that is where religiosity appears. When a person is moved to empower those who are weaker, that is religiosity. It's not just a matter of giving charity, but about empowering the people who are being helped. That's what I call religiosity.

For Ayu, Islamic piety is not simply about one's individual practices, but is expressed in how one relates to people. As a Muslim activist, her definition of religiosity is a highly public one that includes empowerment of those who are marginalized, such as women. Ayu often speaks eloquently about her feminist understanding of Islam. When I asked her if there is a difference between "regular" feminists and Muslim feminists, she replied, "I always say there is no contradiction within myself in being Muslim and a feminist. I am a Muslim and I am sure of the teachings of my religion. I implement those teachings, but I am also aware that there are circumstances in society, including in the Muslim community, that contradict those values. In relation to feminism, Islam teaches us to respect women and to never deny their rights, and so it is in line with feminist values."

Islamic Piety and Promoting Women's Rights in Islam

Rahima activists are very much aware that Islamic teachings are often used to justify discrimination against women. They argue that Islam needs to be reinterpreted in a contemporary context in order to find the true ideas of equality that have been buried under patriarchal interpretations, or to simply produce new and more gender-sensitive interpretations. In advocating this path, staff at Rahima often say that they favor a less "formalist" approach to the religion. That is, they prefer to focus on the spirit of Islam

rather than employing an approach that takes the text at face value. Rahima activists often refer to this as the “substantive approach.”

What does it mean to be pious and practice politics in accordance with such an approach to Islam? Despite the fact that her headscarf and clothing might be seen as evidence of formalist commitment to Islam, another staff member, Dewi, says she takes a substantive approach in her own pious practice of Islam. “I think my religious views are still very strong. And they influence my attitudes for living...I think what is most important is how we are religious and have social piety. Because in Islam, honor isn’t shown by clothing, but from devotion. And devotion is visible in how much someone cares about fellow people.” Dewi’s quote indicates how Rahima’s substantive approach emphasizes piety’s public aspect of social justice.

Rahima activists’ understanding of piety is also critical for understanding how their negotiation of women’s rights and Islam works in practice. For example, at workshops and conferences, staff sometimes talked about the problem of *jilbabisasi*. Thinking they meant the trend of wearing jilbab, I was initially confused when I heard this term from women who themselves wore jilbab. But I eventually realized that *jilbabisasi* refers to the recent proclivity for local governments or conservative groups to pass legislation requiring women to wear jilbab. Rahima staff endorse the jilbab, as most of them wear it, but they oppose efforts to make it a law.

At one Rahima conference, a young jilbab-wearing activist from the town of Tasikmalaya gave a summary of recent developments in her area. She started out by saying that Islam in the area is mixed with local customs and values. She talked about the efforts to implement *Shariah*ⁱⁱⁱ law in the province, noting that “gender activists get threats from Islamic fundamentalist groups and other religious literalists.” In response, a male participant asked if there had been a rejection of *jilbabisasi* by the lower class. “Maybe their analysis is different than ours,” he said. “Women were very much confined and are now rejecting that, so there may be a reaction.” The woman answered that the community does not truly understand religious discourse, and so people only know that they are supposed to do certain things. “*Jilbabisasi* has occurred not from the government, but from groups opposed to sex workers,” she added, referring to local Muslim groups who claim to espouse jilbab laws as a way of counteracting prostitution.

This exchange reveals that Rahima activists consider smaller cities and rural areas to be strongholds of not only an older impure Islam, but also a newly literalist form of Islam, both of which are seen as being hostile to women’s rights. They seek to reform these problematic forms of Islam with their own substantive, modernizing, and gender-egalitarian approach. The difference between jilbab and *jilbabisasi* is crucial, for it signifies the difference between a public piety that promotes social justice, of which they approve, and a piety linked to publicly enforced morality, which they oppose.

“Social piety,” in Dewi’s words, is therefore the key to understanding the activist practices of Rahima. For, as Ayu said, her conception of piety involves more than carrying out proper religious duties. A truly pious Muslim is one who works to achieve

gender equality and human rights. It matters little whether these concepts are intrinsic to Islam or not; what is important is that Rahima members regard them as an essential part of their Islam. In this respect, piety and women's rights are tightly bound together for Rahima staff.

Indonesian women activists like those in Rahima dispute the idea that modernity means that religion must be relegated to the private sphere.^{iv} But they also do not intend for religion in the public sphere to result in an Islamic state, gender segregation, or inequality. In this, they resemble the globally diverse activists described by Badran in an influential 2002 article on Islamic feminism: "Islamic feminism advocates women's rights, gender equality, and social justice using Islamic discourse as its paramount discourse, though not necessarily its only one."

THE PROSPEROUS JUSTICE PARTY: ISLAMIC MORALISTS

The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) was founded in 1998 as the Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan*) by a group of fifty activists. The Justice Party failed to get many votes in Indonesia's landmark 1999 elections and reinvented itself in 2002, with a more moderate leadership, as the Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*—PKS). PKS received 7.3% of the popular vote in the 2004 elections, approximately 8.325 million votes, giving it forty-five seats out of 500 in the national legislature.^v Although PKS is an Islamic party, membership is open to anyone who agrees with its tenets. Party leaders claim not to follow any particular brand of Islam and assert that the party is open to all kinds of Muslims and non-Muslims who agree with the party platform.

The issues currently most important to PKS are political reform, battling corruption, pornography and other moral concerns, and preserving and upholding family values. The party's anti-corruption platform has been credited with winning over many new voters in the 2004 elections. Despite a few minor scandals, it remains one of the only Indonesian political parties that can lay claim to a relatively clean image. It has also long since stopped participating in campaigns by other Muslim political parties to turn Islamic Shariah law into national law.

Distinct from other Indonesian political parties, even other Muslim parties, PKS is essentially part of the Indonesian *dakwah* movement. *Dakwah* (from Arabic) means to proselytize, referring to an evangelizing approach to Islam that started to become popular in Indonesia in the late 1970s. It arose among students returning from study in the Middle East, who were greatly influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Like evangelical Christianity, *dakwah* Islam tends to emphasize a strict interpretation of the Quran, an emphasis on piety, and a conviction that religion and politics cannot be separated (Collins 2003). The activists who established PKS were all part of the *dakwah* movement. As one female cadre explained, "For us, PKS is more than a political party; it is, in fact, a medium that assists us in implementing the teachings of Islam. Islam is a religion that encourages righteousness and brings goodness to the whole world." Like Rahima, PKS aims to reform Indonesian Islam and the country, but the party has a greater focus on personal morality and a more explicit relationship to the Indonesian state.

As an outgrowth of the dakwah movement, PKS has been influenced by the idea that Islam is a way of life. Religious piety is very evident in PKS offices, with women wearing much more concealing versions of Islamic clothing than is the norm in Indonesia, and with men abstaining from smoking. Not surprisingly, as Muslims concerned with Islam as a complete way of life, PKS is very interested in doctrinal matters, even those relating to minor matters of practice and behavior. Unique for an Indonesian political party, they issue *fatwas*^{vi} and have a lengthy set of guidelines for proper behavior and beliefs for party cadres.^{vii}

Many of the women party members I spoke with followed a trajectory of personal religious transformation through involvement in dakwah groups while at university, increasing involvement in Islamic activism, and eventually joining PKS. The dakwah networks were (and continue to be) key in recruiting members for PKS. And involvement in such groups seems to inculcate women into an understanding of Islam that has a strong socio-political component.

Islamic Piety and National Morality

The women cadres of PKS, much like Rahima, are largely middle-class and well educated, and many have jobs as lecturers or teachers. As a whole, the PKS women are enthusiastic about participating in a party that they believe has the potential to change Indonesia for the better.

Widyawati's explanation of how she became part of PKS and what the party means to her is a perfect example of how a new way of being a pious Muslim impelled many PKS women to become involved in political and social activism:

The way I was brought up, I was not taught comprehensively about Islam. My understanding of Islam was limited to conducting prayers and worshipping, which had nothing to do with public life. My consciousness emerged when I joined Islamic study groups at university. From there I found out that Islam is not just about worshipping at the mosque, but also about how it gives meaning to all aspects of our lives. After getting this idea, I committed myself to making a contribution to the environment around me...I do my activities seriously in PKS because I know that I can have a major influence on reforming the condition of society in the future. I believe everyone has a role to play in the betterment of society, and that is what Islam teaches us and what Allah values. This is my motivation—whatever role I am upholding, I must make a contribution, in my role as a mother with children, a wife to my husband, as a member of PKS, or at the workplace.

Piety suffuses the atmosphere at PKS offices and events. Women wear long jilbabs and what appear to be several layers of clothing, often including heavy socks. Men do not

smoke, which is remarkable in a country where 70% of the male population is estimated to smoke cigarettes.

Not surprisingly, given PKS regulations on gender mixing, de facto gender segregation is the norm at PKS facilities. At the central office in Jakarta, men and women rarely seemed to interact with each other except during meetings (which I was not allowed to attend). At public events, men and women generally sit at separate tables, and they march separately at PKS demonstrations. Because music with electronic instruments or female singers is considered provocative and therefore un-Islamic, music at PKS events is often *nasyib*, an all-male singing group, or sometimes a group of men playing drums and chanting.

All in all, a visitor to the PKS offices will note the politeness of cadres and leaders, as well as their tendency toward rather formal interactions. In keeping with the piety of its cadres, PKS offices are clean, utilitarian, and rather bare, free of the shady, smoke-filled ambience of many Indonesian political party headquarters.

Even though the members of Rahima are equally pious in their personal habits and just as influenced by the Indonesian Islamic Revival as are PKS cadres, PKS piety looks qualitatively different. Their manners are more constrained, and more rules seem to govern individual behavior.

At demonstrations, PKS women marching together present a striking image with their uniform long white jilbabs. Seemingly at odds with this performative element, they maintain that wearing a jilbab is simply a religious obligation, not a means of expressing identity or politics. They argue that Islam does not allow followers to compel behavior from others, yet many PKS women also told me they do not oppose provincial regulations requiring women to wear headscarves. They maintain that such laws either ratify customs that are already in place or express the will of the majority. The growing popularity of such legislation—and the stance of some PKS women toward it—seems to provide additional evidence for Brenner’s argument that democracy can at times be at odds with the cause of gender equality (2006).

The PKS way of being Muslim is one in which private piety and public morality are closely linked. Carrying out one’s religious obligations in particular ways is essential to being a good Muslim, according to PKS. For these women, Islamic piety is a public matter. It is about following religious obligations precisely, especially in the public sphere where piety is visible to all. Female cadres express their piety by wearing the jilbab and *busana Muslim*, as well as by complying with the party’s notions of how Islam should be practiced.^{viii}

This link between private piety and public morality is evident in PKS discourse about women. PKS women I interviewed often cited the term *shalehah/solehah* to describe their ideal of womanhood.^{ix} *Shalehah* is an Indonesian term that means to be a good and pious Muslim, and it is sometimes used to describe the characteristics of proper Muslim women, with connotations of obedience to husbands. For example, the Indonesian Muslim website KotaSantri.com displays an article entitled, “Becoming a Shalehah

Woman,” which specifies that, “Shalehah is not just a label. Shalehah is a process for a Muslim woman to permanently struggle to guard her *fitrah*.^x In order to achieve the title shalehah, a Muslim woman must constantly study and correct herself. Especially by constantly studying the leadership of Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, and the examples of the *Shahabiyah*^{xi}” (KotaSantri.com 2004).

Like the article, PKS cadre Susanti, an entrepreneur, connects shalehah to piety as the ideal characteristic of Indonesian womanhood:

I think the ideal Indonesian woman is intelligent, moral, and on the religious side of things, she is shalehah. So that with her intelligence she can develop herself and her family and society, and with her goodness and morality she can influence the lives of future generations, because from her womb will be born the next generation of the nation. What is most important from all this is her morals, because their value is immeasurable. She also must respect the religion she professes, for example Islam, so that she holds its values in high esteem because they are what give her direction. Because in this up-to-date technological era, people can do anything, and I am concerned about the high level of immorality.

Strikingly, Susanti’s discussion of piety and womanhood jumps directly from personal morality to national virtue. The nationalist overtones of her statement are reminiscent of similar statements of her PKS colleagues about how women’s responsibilities of raising children are also connected to building a better Indonesia.

The conception of piety practiced by PKS differs from Rahima. While Rahima’s practices of piety are equally public, public for Rahima concerns social justice rather than norms of piety. Practices such as wearing a jilbab and carrying out prayers at the proper times are public practices, but also matters of individual choice for Rahima women, even if choice is constrained by the belief that some choices are right and others are wrong.

But for PKS members, very much like the Egyptian women described by Mahmood (2005), piety takes on meaning precisely through being practiced collectively in the public sphere. This public aspect of PKS piety explains why there is much emphasis on rules governing behavior and comportment. The strong link between personal piety and national morality is also the reason PKS, like no other political party in Indonesia, produces fatwas. For PKS is not simply a political party, but is also an organization of people attempting to live lives that are as Islamic as possible. And they hope to extend this way of life to the entire country through their involvement in national and local governance.

PKS members seek for Indonesia to have a state that promotes and implements Islamic values. This is the project of Islamization of society and government to which the party is committed. It is a project that promotes a concern for public piety.

Women are the embodiment of the PKS approach to Islam. By virtue of their clothing, for example, women are the most visibly pious members of PKS. And women are easily able to be involved in party campaigns around issues like family and pornography, as these are seen as being related to their own personal experiences. Additionally, the growing numbers of women in the party are compelling a greater emphasis on women's political roles. While these women do not necessarily seek gender equality, they do seek the opportunity for meaningful political involvement.

For example, Sita, a young and energetic cadre, despite having family responsibilities and being in a master's program in psychology, has quickly worked her way up through the party hierarchy. Now she is part of the party leadership in the West Jakarta region. PKS has clearly recognized her talent and given her opportunities to move up within the party. As she explained:

[Between] 1996 and 1998, PKS was in the process of being established. At the time, I already felt that it was the party that was congruous with my conscience. Due to my active participation, I was directly assigned to be one of the board members at the regional level, skipping the sub-district and district levels. Actually, the other day, I was contacted about a posting at the central level, but I feel I am still needed here. For me, it doesn't matter where I am posted, whether at the regional or central level, it is my contribution that counts. I particularly want to make a contribution to women in Indonesia. I've always been interested in social issues and children's education.

PKS apparently encourages women like Sita to take on such public roles and responsibilities. The project of Islamization appears to require the participation of both pious men and women.

The PKS conception of piety reflects a way of being Muslim in which personal piety and public morality are closely linked. Islamic piety is a public matter because it must be recognizable to others. Piety is not just about individuals, but about collective behavior. Islamizing society is therefore a means for instilling proper national piety. In this regard, Rahima is perhaps somewhat less public in its orientation, as members place more emphasis on personal pious practice. These differences in the piety of PKS and Rahima suggest not only that the notion of public can have different meanings, but that the spheres of the public and the private might be better conceived of as a continuum rather than as dichotomous.^{xii}

THE INSTITUTIONAL BENEFITS OF ISLAMIC REVIVAL

The women of PKS, like those of Rahima, represent the new pious middle class (Sidel 2006) in Indonesia. They emerged from the lower sections of the middle class, from modest but striving families who valued education, and they benefited greatly from the expansion of educational opportunities during the Suharto era. All of the women in these groups are activists, but the women in Rahima struggle for gender equality, while those

of PKS work toward a more Islamic society. This latter goal of an Islamic society does not imply gender equality, as PKS women believe that a division of labor is specified by the Quran, but as is clear from the previous discussion, it is not necessarily at odds with women's political participation.^{xiii}

But as some scholars have also shown, the attractions of pious Islam for women activists are not simply at the level of ideology; they also take institutional forms. That is, the Islamic revival has also provided tangible benefits to the lives of many of the women I studied. These benefits are in the form of educational and career opportunities that enable them to take advantage of the public platform provided by Islamic discourse.

In a recent article, Brenner (2005) argues that Islam provides educational opportunities to women who were previously excluded from the state university system because of poor public schools. It was not until the 1970s that the Indonesian government embarked on a massive program of school-building and teacher-training programs. Though by the 1980s there were free primary schools in nearly every village, they were often badly equipped, and high school remained a luxury for many Indonesians. Muslim boarding schools grew in popularity as Muslim parents sought ways to educate their children properly. Then, in the late 1980s, to make state education more competitive with the boarding schools, the government established a system of state-controlled Muslim primary and secondary schools, as well as an Islamic state university system (Meuleman 2002). It was around this same time that the country's second-largest Muslim organization established a similar network. By the early 1990s, these school networks were making it possible for a new generation of Muslim youth to enter universities and thereby gain access to middle-class careers. Moreover, the proliferation of Muslim NGOs and community organizations became an important source of jobs for these aspiring professionals.

Hefner (2000) and others have described how Muslim organizations flowered in the 1980s precisely because of the extreme restrictions placed on political activism. Religious groups, particularly Muslim ones, were one of the only safe ways to be politically active (although they had to be careful not to be labeled extremists or fundamentalists). Moreover, they operated relatively independently, compared to the state-controlled women's organizations.

In the years since the fall of the Suharto government, Hefner (2000) argues, Muslim organizations of all kinds have become an integral part of the rebuilding of civil society in Indonesia. Mass organizations, student groups, neighborhood prayer groups, and mosques all provide crucial and much-needed outlets for people to get to know each other and be involved in their communities.

Brenner (2005) also points out that Muslim organizations, schools, and NGOs provide a career ladder for Muslim women. The children of the poor can often obtain a better education at a pesantren or state Muslim school. Women from conservative families who might not otherwise send them to university can convince their parents to send them to a Muslim campus. If they lack the personal connections and extra cash to obtain jobs in the private sector or government, or they are anxious about being in secular workplaces, they

can find positions as program officers at Muslim NGOs, teachers at Muslim schools, or lecturers at Muslim universities.

One of the younger staff members at Rahima talked about her own life as an example of the transformative possibilities of higher education. When I first interviewed her, she had graduated from university but was still living with her very strict parents in Jakarta's Betawi ethnic community. She explained that at the Muslim state university she attended, her involvement with Muslim student groups led her to question her parents:

Added to this was the climate at *Institut Agama Islam Negeri* (National Islamic Institute), which was thick with discussion. There my thinking was influenced. Truly, Islam is not discriminatory. And there are also ideas I got from my study group, Seroja. Maybe in the house it's those that are a challenge for me. In the house, actually my mother and father are strict. They do not permit me to wear long pants like these (points at interviewer). That means I would look like a man. If I look like a man, it means I won't go to heaven. When I came home from campus, with rebellious thoughts, then I began to question further... Maybe the patterns of the house and the campus are opposite. At home I enter into old traditions, with Quranic studies and the old ways.

Individually, Rahima and PKS women have been profoundly influenced by the Islamic revival. Some Rahima staff have been embedded in Islamic institutions since childhood. But they are also one of the first generations to have the opportunity to be so embedded and obtain a university education and professional career. Demographically, these organizations include both the first and the most recent generations to have been part of the Indonesian Islamic revival. Many of the women I talked to were among the first to take up the headscarf in high school or college, as part of a personal commitment to Islam, and stop wearing Western clothing like jeans or short skirts.

And once they arrived at university, they became involved in Muslim activist networks. Many Rahima staff were involved with the national Muslim student group PMII (*Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia* or Indonesian Muslim Students Movement), which is associated with NU.^{xiv} Meanwhile, PKS women became involved with dakwah groups while attending state universities, and as I noted previously, these networks remain a main avenue of recruitment into the party. Participation in Muslim institutions has undoubtedly helped lead women to their current activism for Rahima and PKS.^{xv}

While the ideas and practices of pious Islam appeal to many women activists, they also may benefit from its institutionalization in Indonesian society. Not only does Islamic theology provide an ideological framework that allows some women to make arguments for equality, but Islamic institutions have made it possible for Muslim women to attain university educations and professional careers. Certainly not all women who have been empowered by Islamic education and organizations seek equality. But even when the reforms being advocated are not aimed at achieving equality, Islamic discourse and

institutions nonetheless provide an important opportunity for PKS women to speak their minds and mobilize in pursuit of various goals.

These newly public aspects of the Islamic piety are not restricted to Indonesia. Indeed, public piety may be one of the most essential characteristics of the new ways of being Muslim linked to the global Islamic revival. In her ethnography of a Shi'a community in Beirut, Deeb (2006) argues that piety that is made visible through public behavior establishes a person's morality and membership in the community. For Deeb, public piety is produced through a general performance of religious identity, especially through women's dress. Moreover, Deeb contends, it is the particular responsibility of women to act as markers of piety due to their historic centrality in signifying modern-ness. For Deeb, women's public activity is a necessary component of the new framework of Islam: "In order to fully enact public piety, women had to participate in the public arena, most obviously through their community service activities...As such, public participation was crucial to both their piety and the spiritual and material progress of the community as a whole" (2006:213). As in Indonesia, Shi'a women sometimes use Islamic discourses to challenge sexism and patriarchy, as these are understood as hindering women's ability to be pious and moral Muslims.

Yet Indonesia is also differentiated from the global Islamic revival by its combination of diverse Islamic beliefs and practices, and a history of women's mobilizations (Blackburn 2004; Ricklefs 2002). The distinctive feature of the activism described here is that women activists employ global discourses such as Islam or women's rights in support of political reforms at the national and local levels.

PUBLIC PIETY, WOMEN'S ACTIVISM, AND NEOLIBERALISM

The rise of pious subjectivities in Indonesia and around the world has coincided with the spread of neoliberalism. I use neoliberal here to refer to forms of governmentality that emphasize a reduced role for the state, the penetration of market forces into everyday aspects of life, and entrepreneurial citizens as the basis of the nation (Ong 2006; Kingfisher and Goldsmith 2001; Schild 2000). As Rose and Miller (1992) explain, neoliberalism relocates aspects of the government into the private sector, and promotes the installation of self-regulatory techniques in citizens that align their choices with the aims of government:

The language of the entrepreneurial individual, endowed with freedom and autonomy, has come to predominate over almost any other in evaluations of the ethical claims of political power and programmes of government. A sphere of freedom is to be (re)established, where autonomous agents make their decisions, pursue their preferences, and seek to maximize the quality of their lives. (1992:201)

Although neoliberalism takes different forms in different contexts (Ong 2006), it can certainly be said that Indonesia has followed a neoliberal path since at least the mid-1990s. The roots of neoliberalism are to be found in the Suharto regime's promotion of foreign investment and focus on export products starting in the 1980s (Robison and

Hadiz 2004). In the aftermath of the 1997 Asian economic crisis and the resignation of Suharto, state enterprises were privatized, and state spending on social welfare cut sharply. As elsewhere, NGOs and private institutions have emerged to provide services that were once the preserve of state or local governments.

Many scholars implicitly or explicitly position pious Islamic subjectivities as a response to neoliberalism. For Brenner (1996) and Göle (1996), women turn to pious Islam as a rebellion against Western versions of modernity, especially consumer culture and “lax” sexual morality, though they embrace the idea of modernity more generally. Similarly, Gökariksel and Mitchell (2005) argue that women in headscarves threaten the unattached neoliberal subjects envisioned by governments in Turkey and France. Indeed, piety’s public aspects and inculcation of divine norms onto the body would seem to militate against neoliberal subjectivities.

At the same time, it might also be worth thinking about the ways pious subjectivities articulate with neoliberal governance. It does not seem coincidental that Indonesia’s increasingly neoliberal orientation in the 1990s helped produce spaces for multiplying forms of religiosity. The state’s decreased control over the public sphere starting in the early 1990s opened up the arena for religious civil society, if not for political activism.

Interestingly, as Sidel (2006) explains, the Suharto regime helped encourage certain forms of religiosity by creating a state religious apparatus, fostering the building of mosques, and promoting forms of religion deemed modern and cultural (as opposed to traditional and/or politicized). Though such state mobilization might seem at variance with the neoliberal vision of an independent public sphere, neoliberalism often seems to produce regimes of governance that muddy the boundaries of state and society. For example, scholars have recently noted the phenomenon of the GONGO – government-run NGOs – as well as the increasing links between civil society and state agencies (Newberry 2008; Sharma 2006).

Not surprisingly, pious Islam has become increasingly commodified in Indonesia. It turns out that the sacred lends itself to consumption, particularly by the rising middle class. Islamic cassettes, CDs, DVDs, books, pamphlets have proliferated, as have Islamic fashion shows and luxury *hajj* trips. Savvy entrepreneurs like the popular preacher Aa Gym have made millions from syndicated television shows and mass preaching events. As with Gym’s popularity, the mass appeal of these new media products seems to be their messages of self-help and empowerment (Watson 2005).

Alongside the public nature of the new Islamic piety is a stress on self-actualization and a personal relationship to God. The women I met at Rahima and PKS emphasized that it was their *choice* to wear Islamic dress, to become more pious. They sought to improve themselves and cultivate their religiosity through studying Islamic texts as well as histories of Islam. Women emphasized to me the pious transformations they had experienced in high school or college, saying they felt like better people when they became more pious. For example, Santhi felt that her time as a staff member of Rahima had made her into a better Muslim. In an emotional speech at her goodbye party, Santhi tearfully told the gathering that

she didn't know if she could be considered a true Muslim, but that she was much happier with the Muslim she was at present compared to two years previously, when she first joined Rahima. As an example, she said she only started wearing a jilbab after she joined Rahima.

While the public character of piety at times militates against neoliberalism, the personalistic aspects of piety also resonate with the neoliberal focus on individual empowerment. The question for those interested in women's rights, then, is to what extent piety can promote claims for gender equality as well as collective social change more generally.

CONCLUSIONS

New forms of religiosity in Indonesia, especially pious Islam, are producing new opportunities for agency and empowerment. The women in Rahima and PKS are not only mobilizing Islamic discourses to legitimize themselves in the public sphere; they also endeavor to reform both Islam and their society. The pious practices of both are remarkably similar, yet connected to different kinds of political reforms. While Rahima staff envision a future in which women serve as interpreters and teachers of Islamic texts in order to correct patriarchal biases, the women of PKS aspire to be moral believers who adhere to proper rules of conduct on individual and collective levels, and contribute to the Islamization of Indonesia. Yet both visions are profoundly influenced by the new public piety and the conviction that Islam is a way of life.

Additionally, new forms of religiosity are profoundly influenced by neoliberalism and the increasing emphasis on the self. Neoliberal governmentality has intertwined with the new forms of Islamic piety to help open up the public sphere to religious civil society, producing surprising new opportunities for women's agency. However, it is too simple to view Islamic piety simply as a response to neoliberalism, as the new forms of Islamic piety presented in this paper have important public aspects that potentially challenge neoliberalism, but at times also echo neoliberal ideologies of individual choice and empowerment. Political changes and transnational discourses of Islam and women's rights have intersected with the shifts wrought by neoliberal economic policies, producing a context in which women can access a greater variety of ideas and are able to be more vocal about contesting developments that affect them. In the new Indonesian public sphere, Muslim women activists are political subjects, but their varied aims demonstrate that women's agency is not synonymous with gender equality. The meanings of piety and the collective politics it contributes to are diverse.

NOTES

ⁱ Throughout this paper, I use the real names of the groups I study, with their permission. This is because the descriptions of them are thorough enough that anyone with knowledge of Muslim politics in Indonesia will recognize them. However, aliases have been used for all individuals.

ⁱⁱ Fieldwork was conducted between 2002-2003 and for several months in 2005. Although my research was ethnographic, for the sake of conciseness, I draw mainly from in-depth interviews for this paper. Approximately ten women from each organization were interviewed. I am grateful to Eva Amrullah, for assisting my research in 2005.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Shariah* means Islamic law.

^{iv} Recent academic debates about secularization and modernity demonstrate a growing acknowledgment of the variety of ways religion is intertwined with modern states and public spheres (Roy 2007; Asad 2003).

^v Northeastern Illinois University's Indonesia 2004 elections website.

http://www.seasite.niu.edu/Indonesian/Indonesian_Elections/Election_text.htm.

^{vi} A *fatwa* is a religious edict on Islamic law, issued by an Islamic scholar.

^{vii} PKS uses the term *kader* (cadre) for its membership. To become a cadre, a person must fill out an application and undergo a series of trainings. PKS is unusual among Indonesian political parties in not having mass membership.

^{viii} *Busana Muslim* means Muslim clothing for women. It generally denotes a particular style of clothing common to Indonesia and Malaysia involving a long-sleeved tunic and baggy pants or a long skirt.

^{ix} These are the most commonly used spellings of the word. The second seems to be more common in Malaysia.

^x Innate and virtuous character.

^{xi} Companions of Muhammad.

^{xii} Feminist theorists have long critiqued the separation of these spheres in Western political theory (Fraser 1992).

^{xiii} Elsewhere (Rinaldo In Press), I describe PKS gender ideology as being characterized by an emphasis on equity rather than equality. Foley (2004) argues that gender equity is a way for those who reject social constructionist views of gender to advocate some forms of empowerment for women, while not challenging conventional understandings of Islam.

^{xiv} Some staff were part of the competing organization, HMI (Himpunan Mahasiswa Indonesia, or Muslim Students Association).

^{xv} Although these are Muslim student organizations, their range is quite broad and not confined to religious activities. They became involved in the *reformasi* movement starting in the early 1990s, and members were active in organizing demonstrations and other actions to protest the Suharto and Habibie governments. HMI drew from modernist circles and was less critical of the regime, while PMII, drawing from NU circles, was seen as more radical. HMI was known for its many alumni in government and academic positions.

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